

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Public Health and Sanitary Condition

OF THE

Urban Sanitary District of Penrith,

For the Year 1918.

The Local Government Board again suggest that the Annual Report should be condensed, and therefore this Report will confine itself to setting out the vital statistics and to giving brief accounts of outbreaks of disease and of any prominent sanitary events of the year 1918.

SANITARY INSPECTIONS OF THE DISTRICT.

The routine part of the work of the department, except in essentials, has had to be much curtailed, owing to the absence of the Sanitary Inspector from illness which terminated fatally in July. The Deputy Inspector who was appointed by the Council dealt with urgent and necessary matters as they arose, and the general sanitary condition of the Town was maintained in a satisfactory condition.

The only Common Lodging-house in the District has been regularly inspected by an official of the Council, and no complaints have been made by him during the year.

MILK SUPPLY.

The number of Dairies and Cowsheds on the register is 24.

There is room for structural improvement in some instances, and it is hoped that with the prospect of a return to more normal conditions these may be carried out soon.

The health of the cows appears to have been good, and no cases of tuberculous disease among them have been reported by the Council's Veterinary Inspector.

As in most districts, the supply of milk was considerably restricted owing to war conditions.

OTHER FOODS.

Your Acting Medical Officer of Health during the summer inspected and condemned as unfit for human food large quantities of imported hams and bacon on account of unsoundness. Frozen meat was also occasionally found to be unusable, and some tuberculous carcasses of fresh meat were also condemned and destroyed.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

Most of the Slaughter Houses are privately owned by the Penrith Farmers' Auction Company. Their sanitary condition and management have generally been quite satisfactory.

HOUSING ACTS.

The inspections under these Acts have perforce fallen into abeyance during the past year. The subject of supplying more and better houses for the working classes is held to be of paramount importance in the Reconstruction Policy of the Government. There is a very marked shortage of houses in this area, and too many still of those occupied are far from being satisfactory, either structurally or because of their situation in confined and airless yards. The Council will doubtless undertake a Housing Scheme of its own in the not distant future, when the whole subject will receive close attention.

PREVALENCE OF, AND CONTROL OVER, ACUTE INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

During 1918, 261 cases of Acute Infectious Disease were notified. Of these, two were Diphtheria, three were Erysipelas, one was Ophthalmia Neonatorum, and 255 were Measles.

It is noteworthy that no cases of Scarlet Fever occurred in the Town for the second year in succession.

The two cases of Diphtheria were sporadic, and were both removed to the Isolation Hospital. The cases of Measles occurred during the first five months, the epidemic commencing just after the New Year and turning out to be one of the most extensive of recent years. Only three of the cases notified were over the age of 16 years, and the great majority occurred in children of from one to five years of age. The Elementary Schools were closed for various periods, but neither this procedure nor the system of compulsory notification appeared to have the least effect in checking the spread of infection. This is quite in accordance with the anticipation which I ventured to express in my Report for the year 1915.

Whether the fact that no deaths attributed to Measles were recorded during the year has any connection or not with the added importance in the public eye given to this disease by its being made compulsorily notifiable, is difficult to determine. Of the cases notified, however, only 43 were by parents or guardians, but it may be that medical advice was more frequently obtained than formerly.

WHOOPING COUGH was prevalent in the spring and early summer, and the two Infant Schools were closed for this reason.

INFLUENZA.

The year 1918 will long be remembered in connection with the

occurrence over the whole world of the most severe and fatal epidemic of this disease for thirty years.

It first made its appearance here in July, but in Penrith it did not conform to the character of the so-called "Spanish Flu" which was attracting so much attention in other parts of the country. The symptoms were similar to former experiences, nor were complications unduly common. Thrée deaths, however, occurred in the Town at this time from Influenza as a primary cause.

The second wave arrived at the end of October and lasted until nearly Christmas, the maximum incidence being reached in the last fortnight of November. This time the epidemic was not only much more extensive but the type was infinitely more severe, while chest complications were very commonly met with. These frequently took the form of a Septic Pneumonia of great virulence, from which recovery seldom took place.

In many instances whole households were ill at once, but it was remarkable how unusual it was for infants to be attacked. The epidemic placed a very severe strain upon the medical men in the Town, of whom half their number were absent on military service, and it was also a matter of great difficulty to secure adequate nursing attendance on the sick.

The incubation period appeared to vary between 36 hours and three days. Many persons who were victims in July also contracted the infection in the second wave of the epidemic, showing that no immunity was established by an attack three months or so previously. A marked feature was the occurrence of nose-bleeding, especially in young subjects.

Upon the whole the Urban District of Penrith suffered less than the surrounding Rural area. Fifteen people died in November and December from Influenza, a few, however, being "non-residents" in this area.

All the Schools in Penrith, with the exception of the Grammar School, were closed from November 3rd until the end of the year, and also for ten days in July.

Children of school age were excluded from the Picture House, and the manager of it was given instructions as to length of performance, interval between performances, and measures to be taken for flushing the building with fresh air.

TABLE SHOWING AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF DEATHS FROM
INFLUENZA.

| Sex. | Under 1 yr. | 1 to 2. | 2 to 5. | 5 to 15. | 15 to 25. | 25 to 45. | 45 to 65. | Over 65. | Tl. |
|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----|
| Males | - | ... | - | ... | 1 | ... | - | ... | 4 |
| Females .. | - | ... | 1 | ... | 1 | ... | - | ... | 2 |
| | | | | | | | | | 11 |

PREVALENCE OF, AND CONTROL OVER, TUBERCULOSIS.

Thirteen cases of Tuberculosis were notified during the year. All were Pulmonary.

CLASSIFICATION IN AGE PERIODS.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|----|
| Under 1 yr. | 1 to 5. | 5 to 15. | 15 to 25. | 25 to 45. | 45 to 65. | Over 65. | Total. | | | | | | | |
| — | ... | — | ... | 2 | ... | 3 | ... | 7 | ... | 1 | ... | — | ... | 13 |

Of the above, five have died during the year.

The total number of deaths from Tuberculosis Disease is 15, which is a higher number than in recent years.

The Sanitary Staff always carry out disinfection of the house after a death from this disease.

MEANS FOR PREVENTING MORTALITY IN CHILD-BIRTH AND INFANCY.

During the first seven months of 1918 the two Midwives stationed in Penrith carried on their usual maternity work, and the visiting of infants up to the end of their first year went on as in previous years.

On the 1st of August the scheme of Maternity and Child Welfare drawn up by your Acting Medical Officer of Health was initiated under a Committee appointed for the purpose of administering it by the Urban Council. This Committee is composed of members of the Council and of ladies and gentlemen representative of the old Penrith Maternity Committee, the Cottage Hospital Committee, Working Women's Organisations, and of the Medical Profession.

The personnel engaged in the work consists of two whole-time Nurse-Midwives, part-time District Nurse, the Medical Officer of Health and the Medical men practising in the Town, to whom their own patients are referred when necessary.

The work itself is divided into three parts—Ante-Natal, Natal or Maternity, and Post-Natal, while the latter is further divided into Health Visiting of Infants up to the end of the first year of life and of children from one to five years.

The Ante-Natal and Natal departments and the Visiting of Infants up to one year are delegated to the two whole-time Midwives, and the Visiting of Children from one to five years is carried out by the part-time services of the District Nurse. It is hoped later on to increase still further the scope and usefulness of this scheme by the establishment of a Centre in the Town to which expectant and nursing mothers with their children could come for advice and instruction.

The object of Ante-Natal attention is to secure the removal of factors adverse to the health of the expectant mother and infant, and to ensure that the confinement takes place under conditions favourable to the life and health of them both.

The Visitors therefore attend specially to:—

- (a) The condition of the mother.
- (b) The condition of the home.
- (c) The provision for the child and its arrival.

(a) Abnormalities in the health of the mother, if found, are pointed out and the necessity for obtaining medical advice is urged, and in certain cases this is arranged for under the provisions of the scheme free of charge to the patient.

(b) Sanitary defects, such as excessive dirt, want of ventilation, over-crowding, &c., are reported to the Medical Officer of Health for his attention and action.

(c) Advice is given by the Visitors as to the preparations needed for the confinement and for the baby. Later on it is hoped that practical assistance may be afforded in this direction to necessitous cases.

Midwives are instructed by the rules of the Central Midwives' Board to send for a doctor on the occurrence of certain complications of labour. The attendance of the doctor chosen by the patient is secured on the written request of the midwife engaged in the case. In all cases the midwife visits mother and child for at least ten days after the birth.

During the first year babies are visited once every month as a routine—oftener when required. The main object of Post-Natal work is to secure trained supervision and, when necessary, medical advice for the children. It is not so much a work of treatment as of prevention, for so many serious results in after-life can be avoided by timely intervention and the faults corrected before it is too late. The feeding and general health and care of the children are enquired into and advised upon, and the weight of the infant is recorded month by month. A ruthless war is waged upon such notorious evils as long-tubed bottles, dummy teats, late hours, over-feeding, &c. When the condition of the child requires the attention of a doctor the same procedure, in suitable cases, is carried out as in the Ante-Natal visiting of the mother. The visiting of children will continue at lengthening intervals up to school age, when they pass under the supervision of the School Medical Service. Each child will then have a complete record of health from birth, to which, of course, the School Medical Officer will have access.

REPORT OF WORK DONE.

During the five months of 1918 in which the scheme has been in operation the following work has to be reported:—

I.—ANTE-NATAL VISITING.

Sixty-five visits were paid to 35 expectant mothers, and particulars

have been recorded of their past reproductive histories, their present health, the condition of the homes, and the preparations for confinement and for the baby. The Visitors are impressing upon the people the great importance and desirability of engaging the nurse-midwife as early in pregnancy as possible. They report that the visits are well received and appreciated, but that it is frequently difficult to persuade women, whose condition makes it highly necessary, to seek medical advice. The old fetish is very prevalent that ailments of various sorts are part and parcel of the period of pregnancy, and as such are just to be borne as philosophically as possible.

This difficulty must be overcome if this most important part of the work is to prove effective.

II.—NATAL OR MATERNITY.

Fifty-nine confinements have been attended since August 1st, and the appropriate records kept.

There were no still-births.

In five cases in which the Nurses were acting as Midwives medical assistance was required and obtained.

III.—POST-NATAL VISITING.

(a) Up to one year:—

402 visits have been paid to babies in this category and the results duly recorded.

The babies were found to be generally well cared for, and to be showing satisfactory progress and increase in weight. Breast-feeding was being carried out in 84 per cent. of the cases.

(b) One to five years:—

225 visits were made to children between these ages, and records kept in each case.

The Visitor reports that while she is generally welcomed, she sometimes encounters some degree of prejudice on the part of the parents. The general health of the children was good, and their care and management fairly satisfactory.

The use of the toothbrush, however, is almost entirely unknown, and the general tendency is for young children to be allowed to stay up too late at night.

No cases of any kind were referred for free treatment to doctors.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The Registrar-General again supplied estimates of population. The

figures for 1918 are:—For the calculation of the Death Rate (civilian only), 7,642; and for the calculation of the Birth Rate, 8,563.

BIRTHS.

The number of Births was 134, of which 67 were male and 67 were female.

The Birth Rate per 1,000 population is 15·64, which is practically the same as last year. The rate for the whole of England and Wales is 17·7, and so Penrith has no reason for congratulating itself upon this score but very much the reverse.

Of the births notified 120 were legitimate and 14 illegitimate, giving an illegitimate birth rate of 104·47 per 1,000 births, as compared with 100·77 for 1917 and 80·00 for 1916.

GENERAL MORTALITY.

The nett deaths belonging to the Urban District number 132, giving a Death Rate of 17·27, as compared with 14·77 for 1917, and with 17·6 for the whole of England and Wales.

The number of deaths of infants under one year was five, giving an infantile mortality of 37·31 per 1,000 births, which is most excellent, being little over half the rate for 1917, while the average for the five years previous to 1918 was 98·14.

The Infantile Death Rate for the whole of England and Wales is 97.

If we can succeed in keeping our mortality low among infants under one year, the greater number of lives so preserved will go far to make up for the fewer number being born.

TABLE OF CAUSES OF DEATH IN 1918.

| | Males. | Females. |
|--------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| All causes (civilians only) | 61 | 71 |
| Whooping Cough | 1 | — |
| Influenza | 4 | 11 |
| Pulmonary Tuberculosis | 7 | 6 |
| Tuberculous Meningitis | 1 | 1 |
| Cancer, Malignant Disease | 5 | 8 |
| Rheumatic Fever | — | 1 |
| Organic Heart Disease | 12 | 13 |
| Bronchitis | 2 | 2 |
| Pneumonia (all forms) | 6 | 4 |
| Other Respiratory Diseases | 1 | — |
| Cirrhosis of Liver | 1 | — |
| Alcoholism | 1 | — |
| Nephritis and Bright's Disease | 2 | 1 |

| | | | |
|--|----|-----|----|
| Violence, apart from Suicide | 2 | ... | 2 |
| Suicide | 1 | ... | — |
| Other defined Diseases | 15 | ... | 22 |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Special cause (included above): | | | |
| Poliomyelitis | 1 | ... | — |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Deaths of Infants under one year | 1 | ... | 4 |
| <hr/> | | | |

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Epworth House, Penrith,
June, 1919.

